

WHERE TO STAY

INSIDER REPORTS ON THE BEST SPOTS TO BED DOWN. EDITED BY ISSY VON SIMSON

FIRST LOOK

MALLORCA IS NOT SHORT OF SMART BOLTHOLES BUT ITS LATEST ARRIVAL IS RAISING THE BAR. PAUL RICHARDSON DIVES IN AHEAD OF THE REST

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANA LUI





SOUTH-EAST OUT OF PALMA ON THE NEWEST section of the Ma-19 motorway, the countryside flattens out into a minimalist landscape of fig and meandering dry-stone walls. There's a dazzle in the sky; the warm air smells of dust and salt. Up ahead lies a huddle of houses crowned by a solid, four-square church, all in the same sandy-coloured, pink-tinged local rock. It might be just over half an hour out of town, but this feels like a world away.

In the old days nobody ever lingered in Santanyí. There was no 'there' there, as Gertrude Stein said of Oakland, California – but there was also nowhere to stay. Only two reasons might take you to this rural town of 2,000 souls in one of Mallorca's least-traversed and least-developed corners: the bustling twice-weekly street market and the untrammelled beaches of nearby Es Trenc and Es Caragol, their waters as intensely blue as turquoise ink.

While the rest of the island bristled with ever-more elegant hotels, it had apparently occurred to no one that this backwater might be a suitable destination for the well-heeled traveller.

Enter Andrés Soldevila Ferrer, scion of the Catalan family who own the grande-dame Majestic Hotel on Barcelona's Passeig de Gràcia. A fan of Mallorca since childhood holidays with his grandparents, Soldevila first disembarked here professionally in 2015 with the Sant Francesc in Palma, where the astute combination of Barcelona style and palatial Mallorcan architecture still stands out among a slew of charming old-town hotels.

stands beside the pool, a highlight of Ferrer's impressive collection of contemporary Spanish art.) There's even a suggestion of the ultra-exclusive inland resort, what with a serious spa, a destination restaurant and a sense of space surprising in a hotel so firmly ensconced in the heart of a town.

Can Ferrereta breaks some rules, complies with others, but essentially makes its own. It is not the world's most piously eco-aware or craft-forward address, for example, but seems happy to recognise that's not what it is about. There's plenty of local input from potters, carpenters and farmers, but Ferrer has no qualms about calling on non-Mallorcan makers for her fine Catalan linens (Lo de Manuela) and Italian ceramics (Bucci).

The floors of the mansion are of time-worn stone and cobbles, the walls a chalky-white traditional stucco, cool to the touch. In striking contrast, windows and shutters are finished in gun-metal grey and black-painted iron is ubiquitous in doors, furniture, cupboards, wall sconces. It's here, arguably, that a line has been crossed. Though the moody modernity of this detailing works brilliantly at the Sant Francesc, it might be thought just a little too severely chic, a little too Barcelona for this country cousin.

Looking through the window of a suite on the upper floor shows the lie of the lovely land. Over there stands the hulking, fortress-like form of the church. Around it clusters Santanyí's townscape of secret terraces and clay-tiled rooftops with only a

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Astuteness clearly runs in Soldevila's veins. Looking for a country property to complement his Palma palace, he homed in on the island's deep south as an area so far bereft of truly sophisticated places to stay (the reinvigorated Font Santa spa hotel and raw-food-and-yoga retreat Cal Reiet being honourable exceptions). The house he eventually stumbled on, a 17th-century mansion in a state of chronic disrepair, stands a block from the parish church of Santanyí where, it's said, the townsfolk once took refuge from pirate raids. Its original owners, the Bonet family, had long since moved away, but in due course a 96-year-old grandmother showed up to tell Soldevila that pigs had been stabled under the restaurant's vaulted roof and the duplex suite was previously a hayloft.

Sleepy Santanyí was all aflutter as the cranes and pile-drivers moved in. Even now, with the business up and running smoothly, curious locals can be seen peering through the windows to marvel at the transformation wrought by 'the Catalans'.

Their sense of wonder is understandable. Masterminded by Soldevila along with Sergi Bastidas, renowned for his knowledge of Mallorca's rural architecture, and Barcelona-based interior designer Nuria Ferrer (also Soldevila's mother), the 32-room Can Ferrereta taps into several existing genres without being constrained by any of them. One is the rustic minimalism of new-wave country-house hotels including Es Racó d'Artà and Finca Serena, where rugged textures coexist with Santa and Cole lamps and Carl Hansen armchairs; the rough with the smooth. There's also the high-end townhouse – Can Aulí in Pollença being the obvious comparison – and the design-led art hotel. (At Can Ferrereta a huge, beautiful bronze head by Jaume Plensa

lone palm tree, a pine, to break the gorgeous monotony. In the far distance the little hill of Puig de Randa rises in the heat-haze. Half-close your eyes and you could be in North Africa. Indeed, lack of shade in the hotel's wide courtyards may prove a problem in high summer, when a relentless sun pummels these dry-as-dust southern plains.

Just as well, then, that Can Ferrereta calls for little exertion beyond a salt-and-seaweed treatment at the Sa Calma spa, a browse around the superb haul of work by artists such as Dominica Sánchez and Jordi Alcaraz, or a supper of modern Mediterranean cooking at Alvar Albaladejo's Ocre restaurant, fast shaping up as the best in the south-east. You might need to venture outside only for a stroll around Santanyí's pretty plaza, a tapa or two at Can Gelat, or a visit to the mesmerising, all-white wonderland of the salt flats at Es Trenc.

Close observers of the Mallorcan scene have been asking themselves recently how many more openings the island can support. It may soon reach 'peak hotel' – but for now, a project as convincing as this one still gets in under the velvet rope. There's a sense that Andrés Soldevila's new place may be to Santanyí what La Residencia was to Deià back in its Eighties glory days. Like that pioneering paragon of Mallorca's country stays, there's every sign that Can Ferrereta will not only implant itself successfully into its host community, but alter its DNA forever. 📍

BOOK IT Doubles at Can Ferrereta from about £270.
hotelcanferrereta.com

Opposite, clockwise from top left: lanterns on the wall by the outdoor pool; dressing room in one of the suites; minimalist fireplace in the library room; four-poster in a bedroom. Previous page, pool at the spa. All at Can Ferrereta